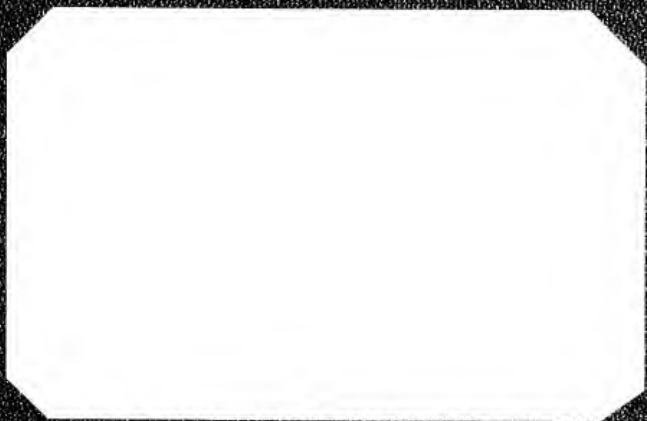


E

458

4

Π6





Class E 458
Book D6 .4

THE PRESIDENCY.

LETTER OF GENERAL DIX

TO THE

COMMITTEE OF THE MASS MEETING IN PHILADELPHIA,

OCTOBER 8, 1864.

NEW YORK, Oct. 6, 1864.

GENTLEMEN : I have received your invitation to address the mass meeting to be held in Independence Square on Saturday. The duties incident to the active command of a military department render it impossible for me to attend public meetings, or make political speeches. But I accede with pleasure to your request to write you a letter.

There is but one question before the country in the approaching canvass. Shall we prosecute the war with unabated vigor, until the rebel forces lay down their arms ; or shall we, to use the language of the Chicago Convention, make "immediate efforts" for "a cessation of hostilities, with a view to an ultimate convention of all the States," &c. ?

Believing that the latter measure, for whatever purpose adopted, would lead inevitably to a recognition of the independence of the insurgent States ; and believing, moreover, that true policy, as well as true mercy, always demands, in the unhappy exigencies of war, a steady and unswerving application of all the means and all the energies at command until the object of the war is accomplished, I shall oppose the measure in every form in which opposition is likely to be effective.

General McClellan, the candidate of the Chicago Convention, by force of his position, must be deemed to approve all the declarations with which he was presented to the country, unless he distinctly disavows them. Unfortunately, he is silent on the only question in regard to which the people cared that he should speak. He does not say whether he is in favor of a cessation of hostilities—the measure announced by those who nominated him as the basis for action in case of his election—or whether he is opposed to it. He does not meet the question

with manly frankness, as I am confident he would have done if he had taken counsel of his own instincts instead of yielding to the subtle suggestions of politicians. The Chicago Convention presented a distinct issue to the people. As the nominee of the Convention he was bound to accept or repudiate it. He has done neither; and whatever inference may be drawn from his silence, either the war democrats or the peace democrats must be deceived.

In calling for a cessation of hostilities, the members of the Chicago Convention have, in my judgment, totally misrepresented the feelings and opinions of the great body of the democracy. The policy proclaimed in its name makes it—so far as such a declaration can—what it has never been before, a peace party in war, degrading it from the eminence on which it has stood in every other national conflict. In this injustice to the country, and to a great party identified with all that is honorable in our history, I can have no part. I can only mourn over the reproach which has been brought upon it by its leaders, and cherish the hope that it may hereafter, under the auspices of better counsellors, resume its ancient effective and beneficent influence in the administration of the government.

Does any one doubt as to the true cause of our national calamities? I believe it to be found in the management of the leaders of both the principal political parties during the last quarter of a century. In 1840 the great men of the whig party—Webster, Clay and others—men of universally acknowledged ability and long experience in civil life—were thrust aside, and General Harrison, a man of very moderate capacity, was selected as its candidate for the Presidency. The principle of availability, as it was termed, was adopted as the rule of selection, and the question of fitness became obsolete. The concern was to know, not who was best qualified to administer the government, but who, from his comparative obscurity, would be least likely to provoke an embittered opposition. This was the beginning of a system of demoralization which has ended in the present distracted condition of the country. It reversed all the conservative principles of human action by proscribing talent and experience and crowning mediocrity with the highest honors of the republic. In 1844 the democratic party followed the successful example of its opponents in 1840. It put aside Van Buren, Cass, Marcy, and its other eminent

statesmen, and brought forward Mr. Polk—a man of merely ordinary ability. Parties which have neither the courage nor the virtue to stand by their greatest and best men soon fall into hopeless demoralization. This system of retrogradation in all that is manly and just has continued, with two or three abortive efforts at reaction, for twenty-four years. It has driven pre-eminent talent out of the paths which lead to the highest political distinction; and multitudes, with a simplicity which would be ludicrous were it not so deplorable, ask what has become of our great men? The inquiry is easily answered. They are in the learned professions—in science, literature and art, and in the numberless fields of intellectual exertion, which are opened by the wants of a great country in a rapid career of development. The intellect of the country is neither diminished in the aggregate, nor dwarfed in its individual proportions. The political market, like the commercial, under the influence of the inflexible law of demand and supply, is furnished with the kind of material it requires. It calls for mediocrity, and it gets nothing better. The highest talent goes where it is a passport to the highest rewards. It withdraws from a field in which the chance of accession to the first civic honor is in an inverse ratio of eminence and qualifications.

Thus, under the rule of the inferior intellects which party management has elevated to the conduct of the public affairs, the peace, the prosperity and the high character of the country have gone down. If the great men of the republic had controlled the policy and action of the government during the last quarter of a century, we should have had no rebellion. Distraction within invites aggression from without; and we are enduring the humiliation of seeing a monarchy established in contact with our southern boundary by one of the great Powers of Europe in contempt of our repeated protestations, and another of those Powers permitting rebel cruisers to be armed in her ports to depredate on our commerce.

Under such a system of political management no government can last long. I know it is not easy to change what such a lapse of time has fastened upon us. Politicians have the strongest interest in placing in the chair of State men of feeble purpose, whom they can control, instead of men of self-sustaining power, to whom they would be mere subordinates and auxiliaries. But the time will come—it may not be far distant—when the people, tired of voting for men of inferior capacity thrust upon

them through the machinery of conventions in which they have no voice, will rise in their majesty and place the conduct of their affairs in more experienced and capable hands. If such a change is not speedily effected, it is my firm belief that our republican institutions will fall to pieces, and an arbitrary government rise upon their ruins; for, unless the testimony of all history is to be discarded, no political system can be upheld except by giving to its administration the benefit of the very highest talent and the largest experience.

Till this reform shall come, my advice to the great body of the people is to hold fast to their traditionary principles and good name by giving an earnest support to the war, and to scan with the severest scrutiny the conduct of those who control party movements. Many of the men who are most prominent in conventions have personal interests to subserve. Even those who are comparatively disinterested are not always the safest advisers. They have lived so long in the turbid atmosphere of party excitement and party traffic that they have contracted morbid habits of thought and action, which, like chronic diseases in the human system, it is hard to alleviate and still harder to cure. The only hope left to us lies in the patriotism and disinterestedness of the great body of the people of all parties, who are facing the enemies of their country on the battle field, with a heroism unsurpassed in any age, or who at home, amid the prevailing tumult and disorder, are working out, in the quiet pursuit of their varied occupations, the momentous problem of the public prosperity and safety. When they shall send out fresh from their own ranks new men to consult together for the salvation of all that is most precious in government and society, we shall have cause for hope and faith in our redemption from impending evils and dangers; bearing, in the meantime, as well as we can, the heavy burdens which have been cast upon us by a quarter of a century of political mismanagement and public misrule.

It is time the people should understand these truths. No one, perhaps, can tell them with more propriety than myself, having been, much of the period referred to, in public life, fruitlessly contending against party contrivances which have involved the country in all the evils of civil strife.

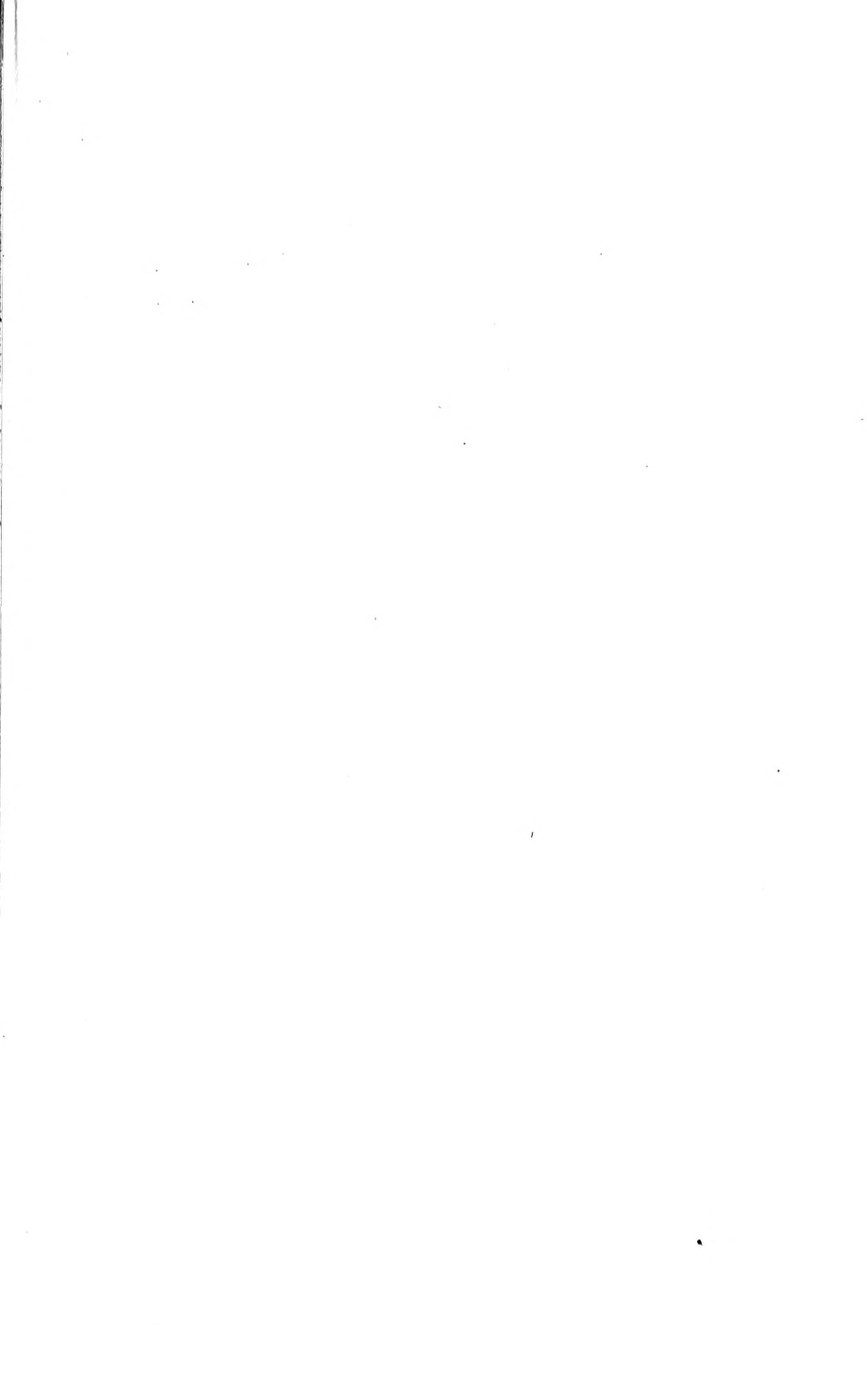
I am, very respectfully, yours,

JOHN A. DIX.

JAMES H. ORNE, Chairman, &c.
CAUWALADER BIDDLE, Secretary.







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 027 994 4